Neuroticism and chronicity as predictors of 9-year course of individual depressive symptoms

In preparation

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Background

The large between-person differences in symptomatology suggest that Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is a heterogeneous psychiatric construct, but prospective studies are scarce. We hypothesized that chronicity (i.e., being depressed for 24 months during the preceding 48 months at baseline) or neuroticism at baseline would predict for adverse course trajectories over 9 years of follow-up for individual depressive symptoms with differential magnitudes.

Design & Methods

In total, 560 patients with a current MDD were included from the Netherlands Study of Depression and Anxiety (NESDA-cohort) at baseline. A multivariate linear mixed model with repeated measures was used with a history of chronicity and neuroticism separately as main independent variables and with Inventory of Depressive Symptomatology self-report (IDS-SR) item-scores as outcome variables. For each individual symptom, the model was adjusted for age, gender, and baseline depression severity.

Results

Patients scored on average 43.13 (SD: 6.10) on the NEO neuroticism scale, and 36.91% had a chronic depression at baseline. Patients with chronic depression or with high levels of neuroticism showed similar absolute rates of decline over time compared to their counterparts. However, as symptoms had higher starting points for mood, cognitive, and somatic/vegetative symptoms, in that order, symptom severity remained higher over time. Chronicity and neuroticism were especially linked to persistent low self-esteem and high interpersonal sensitivity.

Conclusions

Chronicity and neuroticism predict for long-term persistence of diverse psychiatric symptoms, in particular low self-esteem and high interpersonal sensitivity.

Table 1. Sociodemographic and clinical characteristics

	Cohort (N=558)
Age in years (mean, SD)	42.89 (12.19)
Female (%)	64.87
North-european ethnicity (%)	0.95
Years of education (mean, SD)	11.76 (3.15)
Chronic depressed ^a (%)	36.91
Antidepressants	
TCA (%)	3.23
SSRI (%)	29.93
Other (%)	10.93
no AD (%)	56.81
total score IDS-SR	34.66 (11.33)

Note. TCA = tricyclic antidepressants. SSRI = selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. AD = antidepressants. IDS-SR cut-off points: mild depression between 14 and 25, moderate between 26 and 38, and severe from 49.

^aDepressed for 24 months or more at baseline